

of this issue. And you know, there are different options on the table, and we're watching very carefully what is taking place. But any election in any country must be—must reflect the will of the people and not that of any foreign government.

Yes, Gregory [David Gregory, NBC News].

Iraq

Q. Mr. President, you're sending more troops to Iraq now. This comes on the heels of reports that Iraqi security forces appear to be underperforming, appear to be unprepared for elections in January. If that's the case, what would be so bad about postponing elections if there's the potential that those elections may be seen as illegitimate?

President Bush. Well, first of all, the elections should not be postponed. It's time for the Iraqi citizens to go the polls, and that's why we are very firm on the January 30th date. Secondly, I have always said that I will listen to the requests of our commanders on the ground. And our commanders requested some troops delay their departure home and the expedition of other troops to help these elections go forward. And I honored their request.

And thirdly, we are working hard to train Iraqis. And we have got certain benchmarks in mind. And General Petraeus is in charge of training the Iraqi troops, and the Iraqi ministers in charge of that are meeting the goals. And the idea, of course, and the strategy, of course, is have the Iraqis defend their own freedom. And we want to help them have their Presidential elections. And at some point in time, when Iraq is able to defend itself against the terrorists who are trying to destroy democracy—as I have said many times—our troops will come home with the honor they have earned.

It's time for those people to vote, and I am looking forward to it. It's one of those moments in history where a lot of people will be amazed that a society has been transformed so quickly from one of tyranny and torture and mass graves to one in which people are actually allowed to express themselves at the ballot.

Thank you all very much.

Q. Mr. President. Mr. President—

President Bush. Yes, sir.

U.S. Role in Africa

Q. As you march into the second term, what will Africa be looking forward to in terms of America's contribution to security, especially in the Gulf of Guinea.

President Bush. No, I appreciate that. First of all, Africa was a very important part of my first term. I have met with the President—four or five times?

President Obasanjo. Four or five—

President Bush. So many times, it's hard to count.

President Obasanjo. And at the G-8, I think about 10 times.

President Bush. Ten times. I have met with other leaders from the continent of Africa a lot. I have traveled to Africa. I have made the—fighting the pandemic of HIV/AIDS a central part of my administration. I helped work to extend AGOA on the full belief that economic trade and the benefits of trade far exceed the benefits of direct aid. I've worked on a Millennium Challenge Account to help encourage the habits of good governance. And I will continue that focus and attention on the continent of Africa. I think it is vital that the continent of Africa be a place of freedom and democracy and prosperity and hope where people can grow up and realize their dreams. It's a continent that has got vast potential, and the United States wants to help the people of Africa realize that potential.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:38 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Aleksander Kwasniewski of Poland; President Valdas Adamkus of Lithuania; and Lt. Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, chief, Office of Security Transition—Iraq.

Remarks on the Nomination of Governor Mike Johanns To Be Secretary of Agriculture

December 2, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Good morning.

I am pleased to announce my nomination of Governor Mike Johanns to be the Secretary of Agriculture.

Governor Johanns. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Governor Johanns is an experienced public service—servant from America's agricultural heartland. As the son of Iowa dairy farmers, he grew up close to the land. He will bring to this position a lifetime of involvement in agriculture and a long record of a faithful friend to America's farmers and ranchers. He will lead an important agency with the executive skill he has learned as mayor and as a two-term Governor of Nebraska.

I've known Mike for a number of years, going back to my own service as a Governor. I know firsthand his deep commitment to a strong farm economy. He's been a leader on drought relief in Nebraska and throughout the Midwest. He's a strong proponent of alternative energy sources such as ethanol and biodiesel. He's traveled the world to promote American farm exports.

Governor Johanns is a man of action and of complete integrity. He knows how to bring people together to achieve results. He has been a superb leader for the people of Nebraska, and I'm grateful that he's agreed to take on this important new responsibility in my Cabinet.

Governor Johanns. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. I'm grateful as well to Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman for leading the Department of Agriculture these past 4 years. Secretary Veneman has earned the trust of farmers and ranchers across America, and the whole Nation has benefited from her service. Ann played a central role in passing the 2002 farm bill, which has been critical to the success of our farmers.

She's kept our Nation's commitment to fighting hunger and is overseeing major improvements in school nutrition programs. Ann led our efforts to prevent the spread of mad cow disease and worked hard to secure the food supply against the threat of bioterrorism. And she has helped set in motion an incredibly important effort to maintain the health of our forests and protect the lives and property from devastating wildfires.

I chose Ann Veneman for her great expertise, her sound judgment, and her bipartisan spirit, and she has displayed those qualities

every day of her tenure. Ann has also carried out her duties while facing serious illness, and for that she's earned my increased admiration and the respect of her fellow citizens. I'm proud to know her, and I thank her for serving our country.

The policies we've pursued over the last 4 years have revived America's economies and have helped our farmers and ranchers earn greater income and to sell record amounts of food and fiber abroad. In a new term, we'll continue policies that are pro-growth, pro-jobs, and pro-farmer. We'll keep working to open new markets to American grain and beef and cotton and corn. We'll enforce trade laws to make sure other countries play by the rules. We will expand conservation programs to help farmers and to protect our soil and water and wildlife.

We will stand behind family farmers by keeping taxes low and ensuring the Federal death tax is repealed permanently. And when confirmed by the Senate, Mike Johanns will lead a Department of 113,000 dedicated public servants and be a champion of the farmers and ranchers who feed America and the world beyond.

I am grateful to Mike and to Stephanie, his wife, for their willingness to come to Washington. I look forward to welcoming Mike to my Cabinet.

Congratulations. I appreciate you.

Governor Johanns. Thank you very much.

The President. You bet, Mike.

[At this point, Governor Johanns made brief remarks.]

The President. Good job.

Governor Johanns. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:42 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Governor Johanns.

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree

December 2, 2004

Thank you all very much. Tonight we begin a joyous season, and the city of Washington is never more beautiful than during